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CLASSIC IDEALS AND AMERICAN LIFE¹

President Butler's annual report² is in print and is released for quotation and comment in the newspapers of next Monday, November 13. These yearly surveys of the current and prospective work of our great metropolitan University are milestones in the progress of American educational thought, history, and methods. One of the most significant announcements in this

¹In THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY 10.88 the promise was made that something would be said later of the address on Classic Ideals and American Life, delivered by Dr. Albert Shaw, Editor of the Review of Reviews, at the meeting of The New York Latin Club, held November 11 last. This promise is now kept by the presentation, in Dr. Shaw's own words, of parts of the address. All too seldom THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY is privileged to print discussions of the situation of the Classics by thoughtful writers at once in touch with educational problems in general and in hearty sympathy with the Classics. C. K.

²It seems worth while here to reprint, in full, the passage from President Butler's Report (12-15) which Dr. Shaw had in mind.

"Hereafter Columbia College will receive candidates for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and for that degree alone. . . . In 1906, the Degree of B.S. was once more established and has for ten years past been conferred upon those College students who have not completed the prescribed requirements in either Greek or Latin. The distinction between the two degrees, Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science, turned upon whether or not a student had studied Greek or Latin for a designated period. In the action now taken, it is provided that neither Latin nor Greek shall longer be prescribed for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, but that that degree shall be awarded on the recommendation of the Faculty of the College to any student who shall have satisfactorily completed a course of liberal study chosen in accordance with the general regulations established by the Faculty.

That the decision is a wise one for Columbia College can hardly be doubted, although it would not necessarily be a wise decision for a college differently circumstanced. Columbia College is not only a college, but it is the collegiate member of a great university system. It is the door—or better, the vestibule—through which great numbers of students constantly pass on their way to highly organized professional study of one sort or another. It is therefore imperative that the College program shall be broad enough and flexible enough to be readily adjusted to the needs of these various and varying types and groups of students. Columbia College is not at liberty, therefore, to insist stubbornly upon some preferred type of general education, however highly it may value that type. It must, in order to serve the University and the public, meet the demands which a university puts upon a college which is imbedded in its educational system.

The Dean's Report shows that the Columbia College students of today, if classified according to the subjects of their major intellectual interest, fall into groups which rank numerically in the following order: English and modern languages, history, economics and politics, laboratory sciences, philosophy and allied subjects, mathematics, and classics. Under such circumstances, to insist upon a prescription of either Greek or Latin would certainly be onerous and, if measured by results, probably without educational justification in the case of a large majority of the undergraduates. On the other hand, to divide the undergraduate students into two groups according as they do or do not take a modicum of classical study, has proved to be disadvantageous. The action taken by the Faculty, therefore, appears to be the logical result of the conditions with which the Faculty had to deal, and not the whim or partisan preference of any group of College teachers. It will remain the duty of the Faculty of Columbia College to make certain that no man is recommended for the degree of Bachelor of Arts who has not chosen from the program of studies a curriculum so serious, so well organized, so coherent, and so catholic as to entitle him fairly to the possession of that degree which has historically stood for a liberal training.

report relates to the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts. . . . the single degree of Bachelor of Arts is to be granted, neither Latin nor Greek being required.

To the minds of some of our earnest advocates of classical study this might seem to be a wound in the house of one's friends. But President Butler and his colleagues of the trustees and faculties cannot stem certain tides. They must face facts as they find them. I think that President Butler has sound and consistent views of what is permanent in educational progress, and I am inclined to the belief that most of us, after careful analysis of all the facts bearing upon this important decision of the Columbia authorities, would have been impelled to decide as they did.

I make this allusion to the action that Columbia,

The decline in the number of those American students who study Greek and Latin and who have a reasonable familiarity with the history and literature of Greece and Rome is greatly to be deplored. No educational substitute for Greek and Latin has ever been found, and none will be found so long as our present civilization endures: for the simple reason that to study Greek and Latin under wise and inspiring guidance is to study the embryology of the civilization which we call European and American. In every other field of inquiry having to do with living things, the study of embryology is strongly emphasized and highly esteemed. What is now being attempted all over this country is to train youth in a comprehension of a civilization which has historic and easily examined roots, without revealing to them the fact, and often without even understanding the fact, that modern civilization has roots. Phrase-making and vague aspirations for the improvement of other people are, unfortunately, now supposed to be a satisfactory substitute for an understanding of how civilization came to be what it is. It so happens, too, that in the embryonic period of our civilization, man's intellectual and aesthetic achievements were on a remarkable scale of excellence. These achievements rightly became the standard of judgment and of taste for those generations and centuries that followed. When we turn aside from the study of Greek and Latin, therefore, we not only give up the study of the embryology of civilization but we lose the great advantage which follows from intimate association with some of the highest forms of intellectual and aesthetic achievement.

Conditions that now exist lay a heavy burden upon teachers of the ancient classics. They have heretofore been all too successful in concealing from their pupils the real significance and importance of Greek and Latin studies. Unless Greek and Latin are to become museum pieces, those who teach them must catch and transmit more of the real spirit and meaning of the classics than they have been in the habit of doing. Let him who wishes to see classical knowledge in action read any one of a hundred passages in Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, or any one of a score of pages in the *Life of his one-time colleague, Robert Lowe, Viscount Sherbrooke*, or the *Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol*."

This reprint will make it plain, I hope, that the situation at Columbia which led to the change in the requirements for the B.A. degree was, in many respects, unique; as a result, as Dr. Butler indicates, Columbia's action has no necessary significance for any other American University or College. Certainly, it has none whatever for the small independent College or the embryonic University. Secondly, Dr. Butler's words contain a strong presentation of the fundamental, eternal values of classical study. Finally, they contain a call to teachers of the Classics to remember that the cause of the Classics is in their hands: on the way they discharge their task and avail themselves of their opportunities as teachers of the Classics depends the future of the Classics, at least in the Schools, Colleges and Universities. C. K.

following various other Universities, has deliberately taken, because it happens to have a bearing upon some observations that I found myself disposed to make when this agreeable opportunity was offered me to address your body of accurate scholars and thoughtful men and women. . . . Every calling has its inner problems always demanding the attention and vigorous effort of all its members, and justifying their discussion from various angles. On the other hand, every calling has also its outer relationships, its points of affiliation with other callings, its parts to play in the field of public spirit and public service, and its definite relationship to national life and progress. . . .

I am not with you as having gained any place in the ranks of classical scholars. On the other hand, I am not with you on the mere basis of our common interest, as citizens, in the general welfare. It is the other relationship—that of the higher duty you hold as classicists towards the general and permanent standards of American scholarship and culture, in the classical spirit—that finds me in accord with you to-day.

There is something more enduring than methods. Education is a greater thing than subjects of instruction. The classical spirit is a larger thing than classical studies. . . .

We are told that the High Schools which maintain classical studies lose most of their boys long before graduation. On the other hand, it is said, High Schools like the Technical High School of Chicago, founded upon science and the applications of mathematics, chemistry, physics to practical engineering and skilled crafts, are crowded with boys who gladly remain to the end of the period. . . .

. . . If you have not read Dr. Abraham Flexner's monograph on the Modern School, I beg of you to study it without any hostile attitude of mind. . . . Welcome and encourage his experiments—because the thing you really believe in is not one special topic or compartment of study detached from others, but a high intellectual life that can flourish only in surroundings that make for health and growth in mental power.

We are living in a world of such vast changes that we must be willing to subject all of our established institutions to any reasonable test whatsoever, as to the timeliness of their traditional methods. . . .

The Schools, also, are institutions which cannot be exempt from critical test in a period that is proposing to try out all established social agencies upon their merits. Such criticism is not with a view to destroying those institutions, nor with disregard for their larger and abiding uses; but rather it is aimed at the improvement of their methods, and their betterment as instrumentalities. . . .

Since Schools have become our most trusted and popular agency of civilization and progress, and since we have gone so far through the exercise of government power by adults as to compel juveniles to attend Schools (thereby instituting a well-intended and beneficent form of universal child-servitude), it becomes

exceedingly important to know what a School is, what its objects are, and how well it is succeeding in the accomplishment of its aims. I think you will agree that concerning these things there has been too much taken for granted. Even though your own subjects of teaching might seem to have suffered most at the hands of the innovators, I think you will agree with me that your best defense is not to lie in the mere appeal to conservatism. Your work, like that of other teachers, must be justified in what it means and accomplishes to-day. . . .

I am of opinion that your own field has been as badly devastated by shell fire as it is likely to be. You have already known and felt the worst. Let us, therefore, see if there may not be brought about some educational reforms so thorough-going and so profound that with the reconstruction there may be a new and brilliant period for all those things that are true and honest, and just and lovely, and of good report. . . .

For my part, I incline to the view that the larger tides of migration toward America are at an end. We are entering upon a great period of assimilation. I have not in mind exceptional communities, polyglot and heterogeneous, like Pittsburg, Cleveland, Chicago, New York City, but have rather in mind the country as a whole, its great regions, New England, the Middle West, the Pacific slope. If your thinking coincides in the main with mine, you will accept the hypothesis that our American population, as it assimilates the new elements, will again show the desired tendency towards a fortunate homogeneity. Recent infusions, doubtless, will make the American type more cosmopolitan. The English language will maintain itself as the national speech; but language itself, as a study and as an instrument of culture and of the higher progress, will have increased consideration. You will agree that it is desirable in every right way to promote the adoption, by all communities and by all families, of the standard national speech, while also encouraging in all kinds of ways the linguistic, the philological, and the historical study of all languages, present and past. . . .

You will agree that national life, to be at its best, must partake of the characteristics of all life—that is to say, it must show the principles of movement and of growth. It must be infused, therefore, with energy. And this energy must be directed by some kind of agreement and of conscious purpose.

And here we arrive at the question of ideals; for there cannot be purpose in national life unless there be movement, and there cannot be valuable movement if leadership does not set its face in some desirable direction. In short, national life has to be guided by ideals.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, in Europe, there were afloat certain great ideals looking toward the regeneration of societies and of individuals. . . .

You understand the intrinsic nature of those ideals: the liberty of mind and spirit, the largest range of personal freedom for every man that could be made

compatible with a like freedom of his fellows, the dignity of the human soul, the equality before the law of the highest noble and the humblest peasant, immunity from both economic and political oppression in every form, the dominance of intellectual and spiritual forces, and, above all, the power of knowledge and the right of every child to the heritage of the ages.

The attempt to realize these collective ideals gives the key to most chapters of European history since the latter part of the eighteenth century. Conservative parties, as well as Liberal, have professed this larger creed, but have held that changes must come gradually rather than tumultuously. Liberal and Radical parties have demanded quicker movement in the direction of ideal justice. No great parties have denied the fundamental principles; they have quarreled over the method of giving those principles effect. . . .

It would be tempting, if there were time, to identify the pursuit of these ideals with the fruits that they brought forth—their outward manifestations in distinctive objective forms. They give us codes of law, coming down from classical periods, enriched and revised as human society becomes ever more subject to right rules of living. They give us order and symmetry in a hundred ways as respects the general scheme of things. They give dignity to life, permanence to domestic institutions, form and stability to architecture. They express themselves in appropriate language, and with such breadth and depth of meaning that utterances thus made have permanence. And, behold! their literature has a quality that we call 'classical'. Their developed sense of symmetry and beauty creates forms that we call 'artistic', and that so accord with the general ideas I have described as to have abiding recognition. And, also, we call them 'classical'.

But what has been the greatest mission in the world of the truly classical spirit? It has been the emancipation of the human mind and the uplifting of individual men and women to some kind of conformity with high standards. In the nature of the case, the ideal had to seek universal application. It had to find for men religious freedom. It had to work for their political emancipation. And not less did it have to seek their economic enfranchisement so that the spirit might not be crushed by toil and disease and poverty. It is a very narrow view to see, in those applications of scientific discovery and invention that are producing new wealth and improving the standards of living, a movement that is in any manner opposed to maintenance of the high ideals which are the best tradition and heritage of our foremost intellectual and spiritual leaders. The scientific spirit at its best is so closely related to the classical spirit that they can hardly be separated. Each believes in the immaterial. Each believes in the value of truth and in the uses of truth for human dignity and advancement. Scientific research is unselfish, just as philosophic thought and study are unselfish. The engineer and the classical architect are not opposed but are brothers. . . . The released energies of the

human mind and spirit, as aided by the beneficent achievements of science, turn eagerly and with unsatisfied zest to pursuits that are essentially in the classical spirit. Since history is no longer political but is devoted to common men and human welfare, history has to be rewritten in order that men may know how men have lived and thought and worked in the past. And history can not be rewritten except by the aid of the philologist and the archaeologist. Thus classical studies become not so much ends in themselves as new and fresh tools absolutely needed for achievement in the reconstruction of human history.

Do not these things throw light upon possible changes in methods of teaching? Intellectual food, like material food, must be so cooked and prepared as to meet actual appetite. Scientific progress also generates great efforts in fields of art. Architecture is revived through the material wealth that can provide noble buildings. Recall the White City at Chicago, the greatest modern achievement in classical architecture, growing purely out of the mechanical and commercial motives of the exposition.

Consider the world-wide interest in poetry and belles lettres. Nothing could be more certain than that students of politics and society will never forget Plato, or abandon the study of antique life. And so in manifold ways science comes to the aid of classical study. All progress in knowledge and truth, whether scientific or typically cultural, rests purely upon the energy of the mind and the aspiration of the spirit. We must lay aside, if we can, the contentious attitude and seek to be ministers to real progress. The classical languages are an essential part of the history of thought and of civilization. It does not follow that they must be studied at exact ages, or by certain proportions of the very young. The study of mathematics as pursued is even more hopelessly out of keeping with educational psychology. There is such a thing as destroying the possibility of classical training in a given group of boys by the wrong way of enforcing that questionable tradition, the teaching of Caesar's Commentaries on the Gallic Wars. We force Xenophon's military stuff upon boys, when Xenophon's delightful account of the boyhood of Cyrus might make any American boy willing to study Greek.

If I were teaching my thirteen-year-old boy Greek to-day, I would bring into the house our eloquently written New York daily Greek newspaper, and import current materials from Athens. I would set passages from the speeches of Venizelos alongside of passages from Demosthenes, in order to let the boy feel his way into the conception of the permanence of the Greek tongue. And then I would try to make him feel the marvelous persistence of those European standards of beauty and truth and philosophy that have come to us across the centuries, out of the best days of Greece. I would not for a moment hold up one subject as a substitute for another. I do not like the College and Preparatory School system of subjects and points. Real knowledge is not divided up in any such fashion.

It is not the classicists who are at fault, any more than the teachers of Science. It is the *times* that are out of joint. I believe in short courses in subjects if you cannot give long ones, in order to open the mind to the general bearings of a subject and to give a rudimentary start. If I could not give my boy a larger quantity of Latin and Greek, I should certainly give him a little of both, and should make him understand that with an eager and open mind he may readily hope to make some use, as tools in the pursuit of further knowledge, of all the principal modern languages. Nor can I see any reason why the scientific educators should not believe that observational and informational work should include astronomy, geology, chemistry, physics, botany, comparative zoology, and other subjects. Education for Americans must presuppose the habit of reading and of acquisition throughout an entire lifetime. To have the door unlocked that opens into various storehouses of knowledge is to give the boy access to materials that he can use for himself.

Some of you know quite well of an institution in which classical teachers just now are opposing the idea of the establishment of an instructorship, or an extension course, that shall deal with classical literature by means of translations. If any of you have been opposing this idea, I beg of you to reconsider. Ideas are greater than dialects. Encourage everybody to find or form classical conceptions.

And now let me make a few concluding observations, after having taken my full allotment of time. Remember how swiftly these recent centuries have moved. It is not very long since King James's version was a novelty and scholars were studying the Scriptures and theology in Greek and Latin. Our Colleges had more than a cultural ideal when in the early day they prescribed the classical languages. So permeated was all scholarship with classical lore as well as classical spirit, that Latin and Greek were necessary tools for all scholars and for most professional men. The Colleges were small and they were training men for certain distinctive careers. The Colleges have become very large, because a vast number of callings have become professionalized and require scientific and general preliminary training. Classical studies in the technical sense are not as necessary in some of these new professions as they were in the old. Your blacksmith in the old time was not expected to know Latin and Greek. If your blacksmith nowadays becomes a mechanical engineer, it would in my opinion be good for him to have at least a little knowledge of Latin and Greek and a large infusion of the abiding spirit of classical culture. But, in any case, through general avenues of information, your mechanical engineer is more likely than the old-time blacksmith to read and think and at some time in his life to bring his mind and spirit into accord with those permanent intellectual and social aims that classical studies must always foster.

Remember also that a generation ago, when it was not so easy for young men to go to College, the average

student was likely to have more completely the feeling of consecration to the duties and the standards of an intellectual life. Either vaguely or clearly, he meant, like Mr. Britling, to see the thing through. He did not study Latin grammar as an end in itself. Nor was he necessarily wasting his time in his grind of mathematics and Classics. I do not, for my part, believe that he was. I think that there is more enthusiasm for the best things of classical learning and the classical spirit, to-day, than ever before in this country. When I find such a book as Professor Breasted's new volume for students, entitled *Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*³, I am filled with enthusiasm and find myself wishing that I were a boy again and could follow the new classical scholarship as it reconstructs for us the life of the people in classical periods, and teaches us so much that has bearing upon the life of our day and the generations to come. And it makes me the more desirous to encourage boys and girls to become students, to find value and satisfaction in thorough work, but to understand also that the smallest part of the student's life is in the School period. Try as teachers to make students believe that foundations, both scientific and classical, can be so laid in the School period, under wise and stimulating direction, that the processes of the intellectual life may be carried on through subsequent years with ever-increasing eagerness and delight.

As I glanced over my morning paper, on a commuter's train to-day, half way absorbed in our own peaceful presidential contest and otherwise divided in thought between the talk of European Chancellors and the meagerness of my preparation for this talk before you, I ran my eye up and down the editorial columns and found myself both amused and comforted by a series of suggestions. The man who wrote about Wall Street betting on the Election was speaking of "oracles", and "Colleges of augurs". The man who wrote on counting the vote compared Roosevelt with Tilden, and remarked, alluding to the sage of Greystone—"Well, Davaus sum, non Oedipus". The article on Mr. Hughes reminded us that, since he came from the Supreme Court, his voice, like Vergil's in the *Inferno*, was "hoarse with long silence". One allusion after another I found that gave me this thought for you of the guild of classicists: Nobody could really have read and understood that editorial page who had had no Latin or Greek. The truth is that our literature as well as our language, our way of thinking, our general aims and ideals, have all of them the classical impress. We are lifting a nation up to more equal standards of human life and welfare; and we shall have a better chance for classical study, and for thorough scholarship in all fields, in the days that are before us than at any time in the days that are past and gone.

ALBERT SHAW.

³It is very interesting to set beside this layman's view of a book in the field of ancient history the enthusiastic endorsement of the book made by Professor R. IV. D. Magoffin, in his review, *THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY* 10.199-200.